

Capsule Summary

SM-643

Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's  
Ridge Vicinity

Private

(Page 1)

1880-1890s

In the last quarter of the late-nineteenth century, the Maryland Oyster Commission and the United States Fish Commission mobilized their resources to order to stem the overharvesting of oysters and coastline fisheries. Beginning in 1881, the Maryland Oyster Commission established one of a series of oyster breeding stations near St. Jeromes Creek. At its peak of operations, the station included at least six retaining ponds for raising oyster spat and mackerel, a cottage for employees and scientists, an ice house, a pier, and an artesian well. The facility continued in operation until the 1890s. While short lived, the facility documents some of the first attempts by both federal and state agencies to artificially culture oysters along the Chesapeake Bay. No above ground resources from the station are currently visible, although there may be some underwater remains of the concrete lined ponds and oyster collectors.

With the introduction of the oyster dredger in the mid-nineteenth century, the oystering industry and market grew exponentially. Dredgers plying the waters from New England to the mid-Atlantic states harvested larger and larger numbers of the tasty bivalve. The efficiency and popularity of the dredger, however, quickly exhausted oyster beds throughout the region as they left too few reproducing oysters to replenish the population. The result was a steady decline in populations to near crisis levels leaving oystermen to find alternate locations to apply their trade.<sup>1</sup> Oysterman from New England, for instance, soon flooded the waters in the Chesapeake Bay which still retained a ready supply and market. It did not take long for the Bay waters to become over harvested as well, for by the 1880s dredgers had entered the Potomac River and began raiding private oyster beds ultimately resulting in a number of armed encounters between local and

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Wennersten, The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay (Centreville, Md: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), 13-14. See also Regina Combs Hammett, History of St. Mary's County, Maryland: 1634-1990 (Ridge, Md: N.p., 1994), 400-401.

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(Page 2)

1880-1890s

"foreign" watermen that have often been referred to as the "Oyster Wars."

The violence of the oyster wars was handled through armed police patrols, legislation, and prohibitions, while scientists actively sought a more permanent solutions to the overharvesting problem. In the formation of the Maryland Oyster Commission (MOC), a mandate to artificially propagate oysters was given in an attempt to restore populations and thus stabilize the regional seafood economy. After successful experiments at a station in Crisfield, Maryland in 1879 proved fruitful, the MOC chose a site near St. Jeromes Creek to become the site of an MOC experimental station in 1880. A 62 1/2 acre tract located on Fresh Pond Neck was initially leased by the Maryland Fisheries Commission from Mr. John W. Wrightson beginning in 1880. In 1881 the MOC, with assistance from the United States Fish and Fisheries Commission, erected an ice house, a cottage for employees, and cleared and graded the land appropriately. That same year Congress authorized \$6,000 to dredge the channel at the mouth of the creek to facilitate boat traffic to and from the facility. None of this activity escaped the barbed attention of the local press for on February 2, 1882, the St. Mary's Beacon wrote

The Fish Commissioners are at work near the mouth of St. Jeromes Creek, erecting houses, clearing, &c, preparatory to their Spring work, hatching oysters. It really seems that Uncle Sam's pocket book is like the purse of Fortinatus - inexhaustible - for, thousands of dollars are annually expended for some experiment which is productive of no good whatever.<sup>2</sup>

By October 1882, the lease, and hence the responsibility for the station, was transferred to the U.S. Fish Commission.

Experiments at the station were conducted in both natural and man made environments.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Mary's Beacon, v 19: 23, p3, c 2, 2 February 1882.

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(Page 3)

1880-1890s

Beginning in 1883, impermanent squares were staked off at various locations near the station. In 1884 five interconnected ponds, constructed of concrete and lined with slate, were installed.<sup>3</sup>

These ponds greatly facilitated experiments with both oysters as well as Spanish mackerel, but the results were far from encouraging for the 1887 Committee of Inquiry wrote

Fresh lots of newly fertilized eggs {of oysters} were placed in the ponds almost daily during the spawning season, but, though the conditions were varied from time to time, the results, either here or in the open water in the vicinity of the oyster beds, were far from satisfactory.

Despite the lack of success, the committee suggested one more year of operation, but if the results did not improve, then "no further outlay of money will, in our opinion, be advisable."

It appears that this advice was heeded for the December 19, 1888 issue of the Beacon advertised an auction of U.S. Fish Commission property was going to be held at St. Jerome's Station near Ridge. Property included the Ice house, boats, pumps, as well as plank, laths, tiles, and slate used for the oyster collectors.<sup>4</sup> Sometime after this date the facility seems to have been abandoned. Overall, the Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jeromes Creek captures the intense state and federal interest in artificial propagation of oysters and fish for the Chesapeake Bay. While only underwater evidence of the station remains, it represents an important record of scientific experimentation and overfishing of the Bay in the 1880s.

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<sup>3</sup> Clarence D. Bradburn, Some Important People and Events of St. Mary's (N.p.: N. p., 1977), 92-97.

<sup>4</sup> St. Mary's Beacon, v 49: 417, p2, c 3, 13 December 1888.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jeromes Creek  
St. Mary's County  
Maryland Comprehensive State Historic Preservation Data

Historic Context

Geographic Organization:

Western Shore

Chronological/Developmental Period:

Industrial/Urban Dominance, 1870-1930

Historic Period Theme:

Architecture  
Economic  
Government/Law

Resource Type

Category:

Site

Historic Environment:

Rural Waterfront

Historic Function and Use:

Oyster Breeding Station and Fish Hatchery

Known Design Source:

None

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**State Historic Sites Inventory Form**

MARYLAND INVENTORY OF  
HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Survey No. SM-643

Magi No.

DOE   yes   no

**1. Name** (indicate preferred name)

historic Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jeromes Creek (pref), Fish Commission Farm

and/or common

**2. Location**

Farm located on the north side of Murray Rd., near Chesapeake Bay  
street & number

   not for publication

city, town Scotland

   vicinity of

congressional district   1  

state Maryland

county St. Mary's

TM-71, G-16, P-188

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<u>  </u> district	<u>  </u> public	<u>  </u> <u>X</u> occupied	<u>  </u> <u>X</u> agriculture	<u>  </u> museum
<u>X</u> building(s)	<u>  </u> <u>X</u> private	<u>  </u> unoccupied	<u>  </u> commercial	<u>  </u> park
<u>  </u> structure	<u>  </u> both	<u>  </u> work in progress	<u>  </u> educational	<u>  </u> private residence
<u>  </u> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<u>  </u> entertainment	<u>  </u> religious
<u>  </u> object	<u>  </u> in process	<u>  </u> <u>X</u> yes: restricted	<u>  </u> government	<u>  </u> scientific
	<u>  </u> being considered	<u>  </u> yes: unrestricted	<u>  </u> industrial	<u>  </u> transportation
	<u>X</u> not applicable	<u>  </u> no	<u>  </u> military	<u>  </u> other:

**4. Owner of Property** (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Edna O'Dea Lloyd and Mary Lloyd Willoughby

street & number 7403 Berkshire Drive

telephone no.:

city, town Clinton

state and zip code Md 20735

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Mary's County Courthouse

liber EWA 1014

street & number

folio 377

city, town Leonardtown

state Md

**6. Representation in Existing** Historical Surveys

title

date

   federal    state    county    local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

## 7. Description

Survey No. SM-643

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Contributing Resource Count: 1

The site of the Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek is located at the end of Murray Road near Scotland, Maryland. Situated approximately 0.4 of a mile north of the intersection of Fresh Pond Neck and Murray Road, the facility once overlooked the Chesapeake Bay that lies to the east and the Fish Commission pond to the north. The 70 + acre tract leased by the Fish Commission is presently divided into tracts that contain at least two residences and a neighboring pine woodland.

Composed of at least six retaining ponds for raising oyster spat, a cottage for employees and scientists, an ice house, pier, and artesian well, the Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek was an extensive federal and state fish commission facility constructed c. 1880 that was eventually abandoned in the 1890s. Plats and maps indicate that much of the facility was located on a small jut of land that extends into Fish Commission Pond -- a tract currently occupied by the aforementioned two dwellings. No above ground resources are presently evident from the facility. Local boaters, however, note that slate, concrete and other materials are known to be located in and around the Fish Commission Pond thus pinpointing its location.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. SM-643

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
— prehistoric	— archeology-prehistoric	— community planning	— landscape architecture	— religion
— 1400–1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> conservation	— law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> science
— 1500–1599	— agriculture	— economics	— literature	— sculpture
— 1600–1699	— architecture	— education	— military	— social/
— 1700–1799	— art	— engineering	— music	humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	— commerce	— exploration/settlement	— philosophy	— theater
— 1900–	— communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	— politics/government	— transportation
		— invention		— other (specify)

### Specific dates

### Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☒ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☒ national ☒ state ☒ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Maryland Oyster Commission and the United States Fish Commission mobilized their resources to order to stem the overharvesting of oysters and coastline fisheries. Beginning in 1881, the Maryland Oyster Commission established one of a series of oyster breeding stations on a small pond off St. Jeromes Creek, near Ridge, Maryland. At its peak of operations, the station included at least six retaining ponds for raising oyster spat, a cottage for employees and scientists, an ice house, a pier, and an artesian well. The facility continued in operation until the 1890s. While short lived, the facility documents some of the first attempts by both federal and state agencies to artificially culture oysters along the Chesapeake Bay. Many state and federal level documents from the period relay a particularly candid view of the work that occurred there. No above ground resources from the station are currently visible although there may be some underwater remains of the concrete lined ponds and oyster collectors.

With the introduction of the oyster dredger in the mid-nineteenth century, the oystering industry and market grew exponentially. Dredgers plying the waters from New England to the mid-Atlantic states harvested larger and larger numbers of the tasty bivalve. The efficiency and popularity of the dredger, however, quickly exhausted oyster beds throughout the region as they left too few reproducing oysters to replenish the population. The result was a steady decline in populations to near crisis levels leaving oystermen to find alternate locations to apply their trade.<sup>1</sup> Oysterman from New England, for instance, soon flooded the waters in the Chesapeake Bay which still retained a ready supply and market. It did not take long for the Bay waters to become overharvested as well, for by the 1880s dredgers had entered the Potomac River and began raiding private oyster beds ultimately resulting in a number of armed encounters between local and "foreign" watermen that have often been referred to as the "Oyster Wars."

While politicians dealt with the violence of the oyster wars through armed police patrols, legislation, and prohibitions, scientists actively sought solutions to the overharvesting problem. In the formation of the Maryland Oyster Commission (MOC), a mandate to artificially propagate oysters was given in an attempt to restore populations and thus stabilize the regional seafood

<sup>1</sup> John R. Wennersten, The Oyster Wars of Chesapeake Bay (Centreville, Md: Tidewater Publishers, 1981), 13-14. See also Regina Combs Hammett, History of St. Mary's County, Maryland: 1634-1990 (Ridge, Md: N.p., 1994), 400-401.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. SM-643

See Significance.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2 acres near Fish Commission PondQuadrangle name Point Lookout, MdQuadrangle scale 1:24 000UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

Same as per deed description.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk E. Ranzetta, Historic Sites Surveyororganization St. Mary's County Dept. of Planning & Zoningdate 8-14-98street & number 22740 Washington Streettelephone 301-475-4662city or town Leonardtownstate Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to:

Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
DHCP/DHCD  
100 COMMUNITY PLACE  
CROWNSVILLE, MD 21032-2021  
514-7600



## SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek St. Mary's County 8.1 Significance

economy. After successful experiments at a station in Crisfield, Maryland in 1879 proved fruitful, the MOC chose a site near St. Jeromes Creek to become the site of an MOC experimental station in 1880. An 1887 report written by a United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries' Committee of Inquiry described the site as ideal for natural and artificial oyster breeding activities noting that.

...the "Southern Prong" {of St. Jerome's Creek} as it is called locally, being a broad but shallow lagoon abound{s} in native oysters of excellent quality. Near by is a natural pond of several acres communicating with the lagoon by means of a narrow channel through which the tide ebbs and flows. This pond also abounds in oysters, and was considered to be especially adapted for use as an oyster park.<sup>2</sup>

A 62 1/2 acre tract located on Fresh Pond Neck was initially leased by the Maryland Fisheries Commission from Mr. John W. Wrightson beginning in 1880. In 1881 the MOC, with assistance from the United States Fish and Fisheries Commission, erected an ice house, a cottage for employees, and cleared and graded the land appropriately. That same year Congress authorized \$6,000 to dredge the channel at the mouth of the creek to facilitate boat traffic to and from the facility. None of this activity escaped the barbed attention of the local press for on February 2, 1882, the St. Mary's Beacon wrote

The Fish Commissioners are at work near the mouth of St. Jeromes Creek, erecting houses, clearing, &c, preparatory to their Spring work, hatching oysters. It really seems that Uncle Sam's pocket book is like the purse of Fortinatus - inexhaustible - for, thousands of dollars are annually expended for some experiment which is productive of no good whatever.<sup>3</sup>

By October 1882, the lease, and hence the responsibility for the station, was transferred to the U.S. Fish Commission. The U.S. Fish Commission remained actively involved at the station into the 1890s when it finally abandoned the facility.

Experiments at the station were conducted in both natural and man made environments. Beginning in 1883, impermanent squares were staked off at various locations near the station. In 1884 five interconnected ponds, constructed of concrete and lined with slate, were installed.<sup>4</sup> These ponds greatly facilitated experiments with both oysters as well as Spanish mackerel, but the results were far from encouraging for the 1887 Committee of Inquiry wrote

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2 Report upon the Station at St. Jerome's, Md., By the Committee of Inquiry, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Submitted December 24th, 1887; Records of the Division of Fish Culture; Record Group 22; National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP). Much of the station's history is documented in this report.

3 St. Mary's Beacon, v 19: 23, p3, c 2, 2 February 1882.

4 Clarence D. Bradburn, Some Important People and Events of St. Mary's (N.p.: N. p., 1977), 92-97.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
St. Mary's County  
8.2 Significance

Fresh lots of newly fertilized eggs {of oysters} were placed in the ponds almost daily during the spawning season, but, though the conditions were varied from time to time, the results, either here or in the open water in the vicinity of the oyster beds, were far from satisfactory.

Despite the lack of success, the committee suggested one more year of operation, but if the results did not improve, then "no further outlay of money will, in our opinion, be advisable."

It appears that this advice was heeded for the December 19, 1888 issue of the Beacon advertised an auction of U.S. Fish Commission property was going to be held at St. Jerome's Station near Ridge. Property included the Ice house, boats, pumps, as well as plank, laths, tiles, and slate used for the oyster collectors.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the St. Mary's Beacon reported in 1889 that experiments had resumed noting that

Captain Tanner of the Fish-Hawk appeared off the mouth of St. Jeromes Creek a few days ago with barges for the U.S. Fish Commission division A. It is the object of the party in command of the Commission to commence the experiment of hatching mackerel in the above named creek...<sup>6</sup>

Sometime after this date the facility seems to have been abandoned for Clarence Bradburn writes that

The last I learned about it was, the same little tugboat came back to the hatchery and men who came on it removed all the slate that could be gotten. They removed everything of value, both inside and out, leaving the piers, the ten room house and the ice house intact. After a few years of useless unoccupation the roof of the ice house caved in. The piers, from lack of use, deteriorated and were no more....Erosion, also from lack of use washed the partitions from all of the vats and the whole hatchery seemed to disintegrate...<sup>7</sup>

A 1924 plat by county surveyor Charles A. Heard depicts much of the former Fish Commission property. Only the dwelling and old artesian well are noted as surviving. Both of these resources have since been demolished or removed from the property. Overall, the Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jeromes Creek captures the intense state and federal interest in artificial propagation of oysters and fish for the Chesapeake Bay. While only underwater evidence of the station remains, it still represents an important record of scientific experimentation and overfishing of the Bay in the 1880s.

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<sup>5</sup> St. Mary's Beacon, v 49: 417, p2, c 3, 13 December 1888.

<sup>6</sup> St. Mary's Beacon, v 50: 458, p 3, c 3, 26 September 1889.

<sup>7</sup> Bradburn, 96.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
 St. Mary's County  
 8.3 Significance

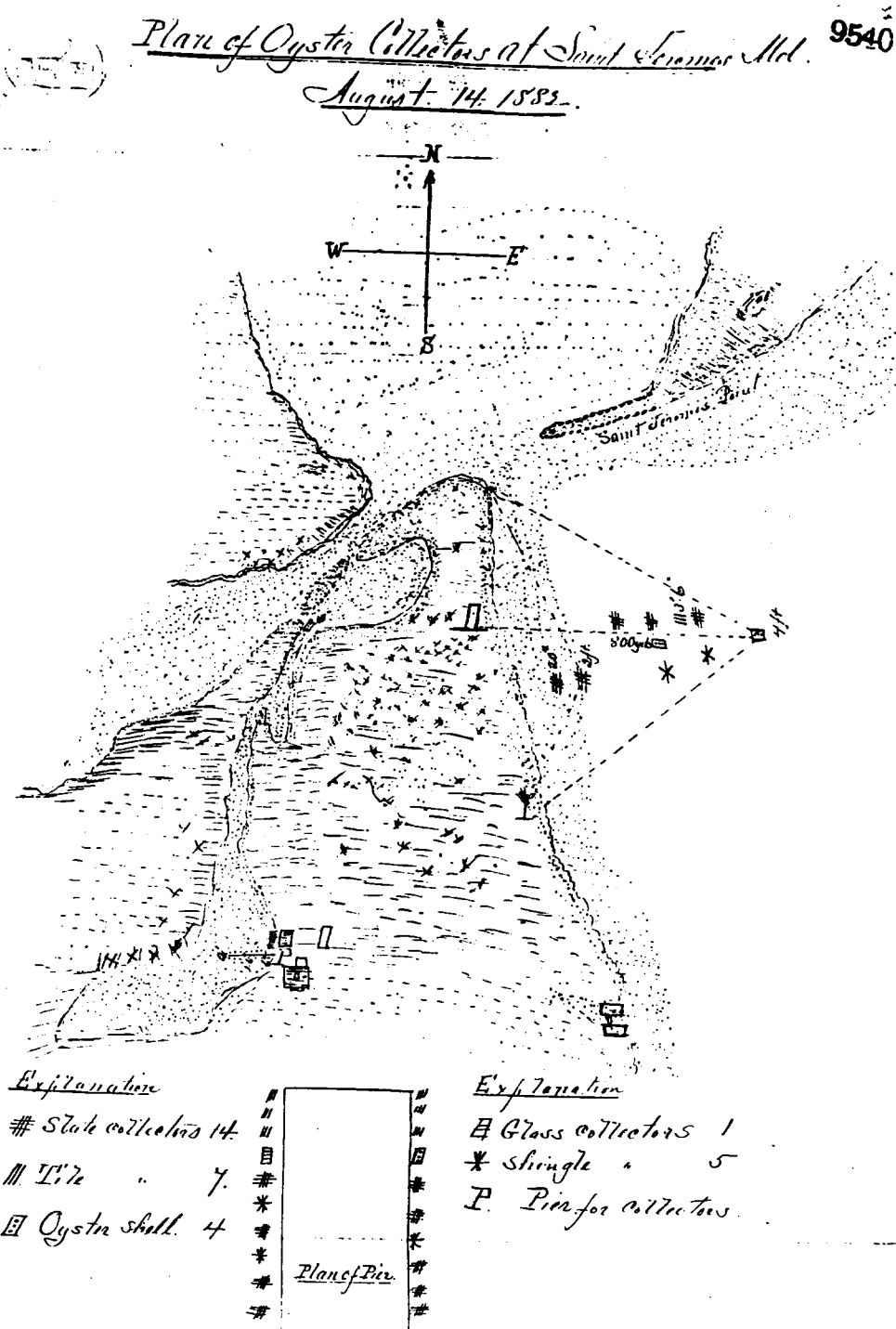


Figure 1. Plan of Oyster Collectors at St. Jeromes, Md., August 14, 1882, by William C. Babcock. Records of the Division of Fish Culture; Record Group 22; National Archives at College Park, Md (NACP).

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
St. Mary's County  
8.4 Significance

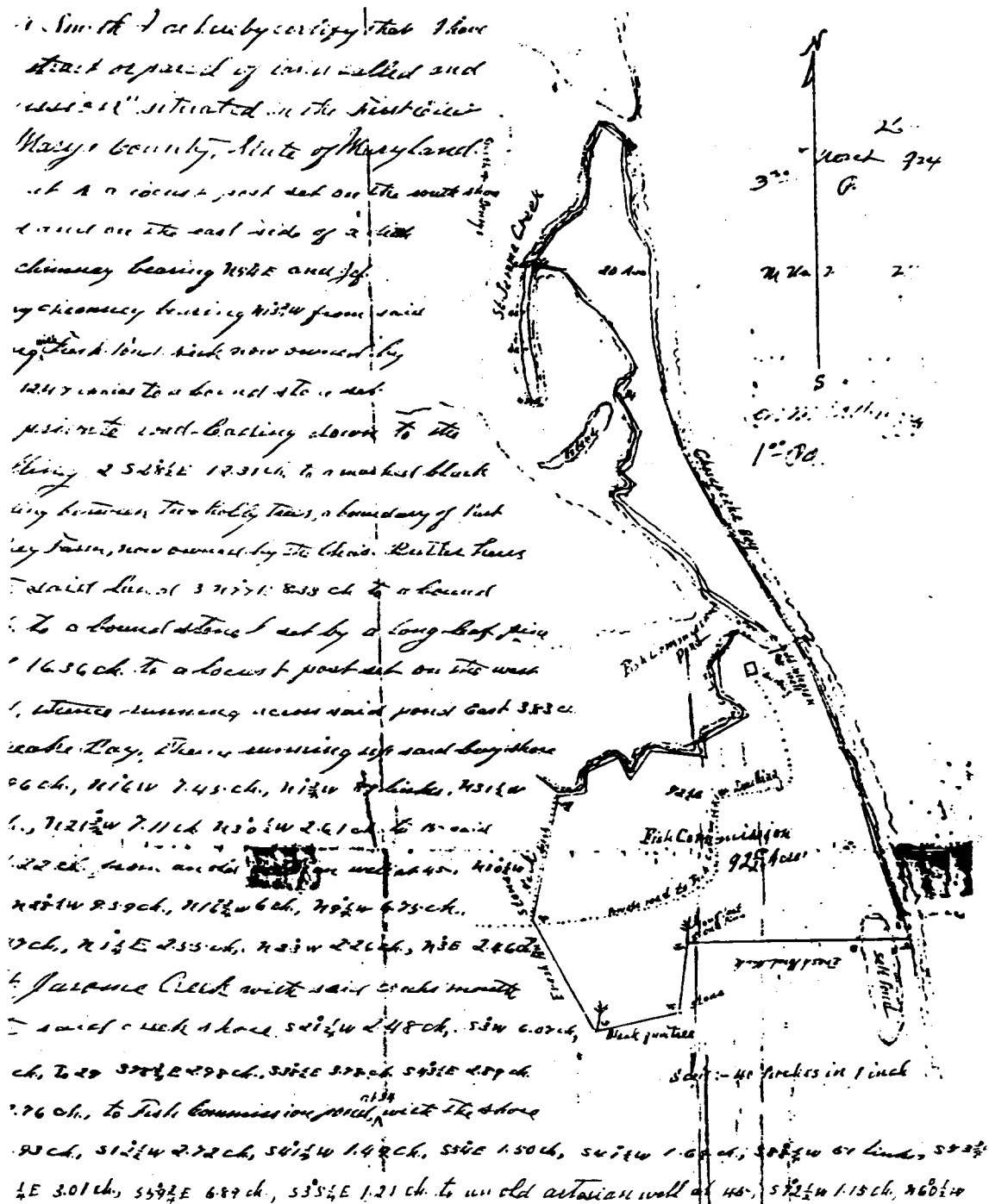


Figure 2. Survey of Fish Commission Farm property by Charles A. Heard, February 2, 1924.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
 St. Mary's County  
 8.5 Significance

REPORT MARYLAND OYSTER COMMISSION.

PLATE V



FIGURE 1

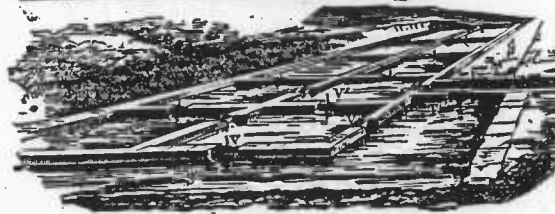


FIGURE 2.

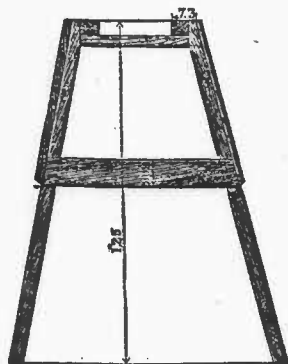


FIGURE 3.

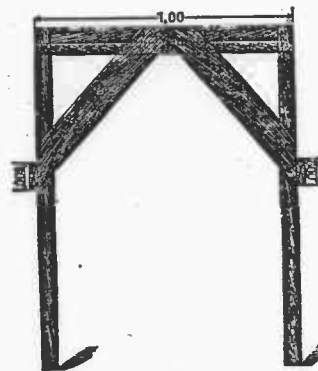


FIGURE 4.



FIGURE 5.

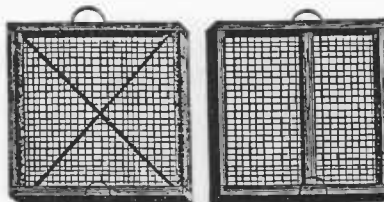


FIGURE 7.



FIGURE 6.

Figure 3. Illustrations showing "artificial ponds for rearing and fattening oysters", frames for supporting tile collectors, and other devices utilized for the collection of oyster spat. From Report of the Oyster Commission of the State of Maryland, January 1884(Annapolis, Md: James Young, State Printer, 1884), Plate V. Courtesy of Robert Hurry, Calvert Marine Museum.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
St. Mary's County  
8.6 Significance

REPORT MARYLAND OYSTER COMMISSION.

PLATE XII.

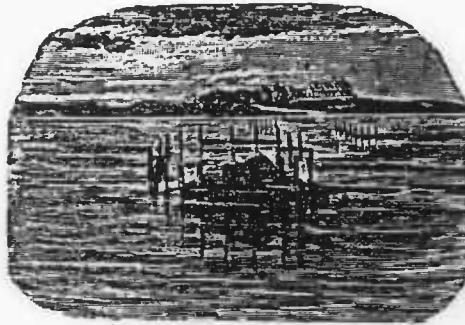


FIGURE 1.

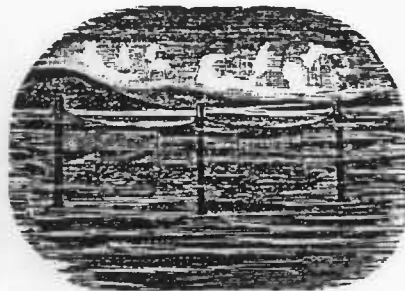


FIGURE 2.



FIGURE 3.

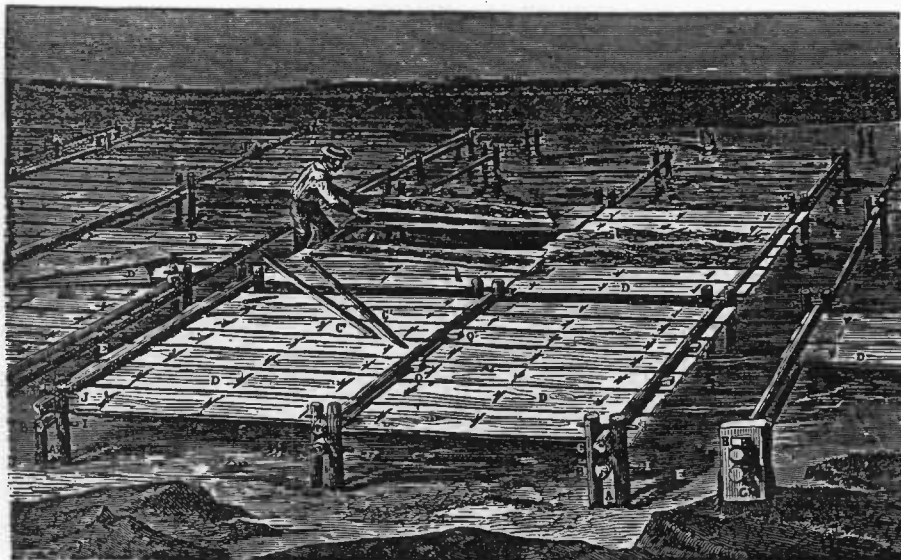


FIGURE 4.

Figure 4. Other methods of artificially raising oysters included driving stakes in the ground. Each stake was then connected with a rope so branches, plaster lath, or other materials could be suspended thus providing an ideal environment for oyster spat. The bottom picture depicts a "platform collector" used when creek bottoms were too muddy to support spat. From Report of the Oyster Commission of the State of Maryland, January 1884 (Annapolis, Md: James Young, State Printer, 1884), Plate V. Courtesy of Robert Hurry, Calvert Marine Museum.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
 St. Mary's County  
 8.7 Significance

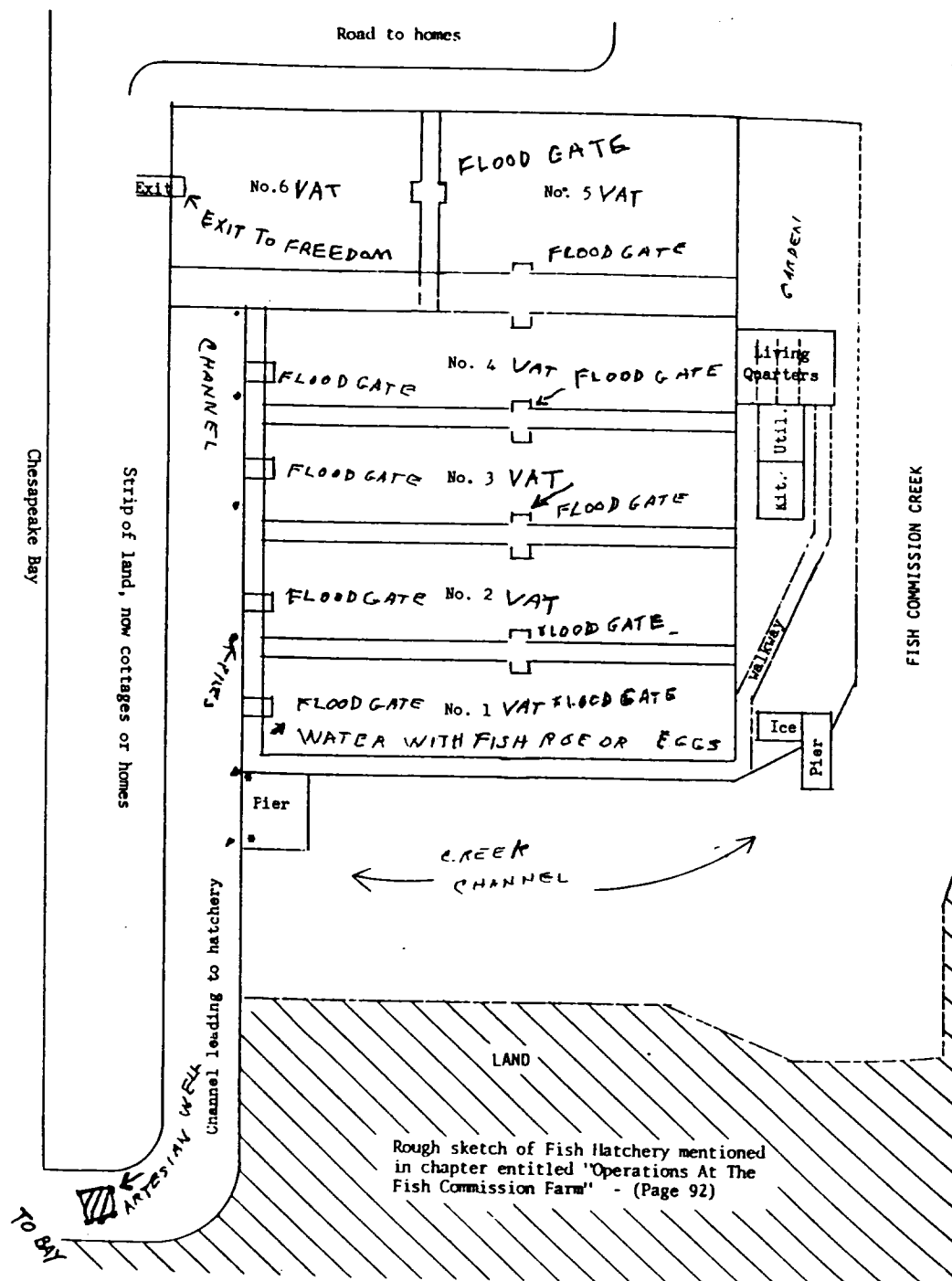


Figure 5. Drawing of the oyster breeding station by Clarence D. Bradburn based upon the accounts of Fish Commission employee Mr. Louis Eva. Clarence D. Bradburn, Some Important People and Events of St. Mary's (N.p.: N.p., 1977), unnumbered endpage.

SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at St. Jerome's Creek  
St. Mary's County  
8.8 Significance

Chain-of-Title

(All deeds are located at the Land Records Office, St. Mary's County Courthouse, Leonardtown, Maryland unless otherwise noted.)

Reference: Liber EWA 1014, Folio 377

Grantee: Edna O'Dea Lloyd and Mary Lloyd Willoughby

Grantor: Edna O'Dea Lloyd

Date: September 23, 1995

Notes: The property is called the "Fish Pond Property," "Fish Commission Pond Property," and Fish Commission Farm."

Reference: Liber EWA 1010, Folio 203

Grantee: Edna O'Dea Lloyd

Grantor: Mary L. Willoughby, personal representative of Joseph H. O'Dea

Date: 1994

Reference: Liber JMM 11, Folio 92

Grantee: Leo Murray and Lawrence A. O'Dea

Grantor: John H. T. Briscoe and Robert E. Wigginton, trustees

Date: April 15, 1938

Notes: As a result of a circuit court case #1674 NE decision dated February 4, 1938 between Sylvester Thomas, et al v. Charles Smith, et al, the 92 1/2 acre Fish Commission property is sold at auction.

Reference: Liber JMM 6, Folio 342

Grantee: Sylvester Thomas

Grantor: John H. T. Briscoe

Date: April 30, 1929

Notes: In circuit court case #1460 NE, Sylvester Thomas is deemed entitled to 1/2 interest in the Fish Commission property, now also called "Part of Fresh Pond Neck."

Reference: Liber JMM 2, Folio 208

Grantee: Charles Smith

Grantor: Elizabeth Powell Joyner, et al

Date: March 5, 1924

Reference: Liber EBA 15, Folio 405

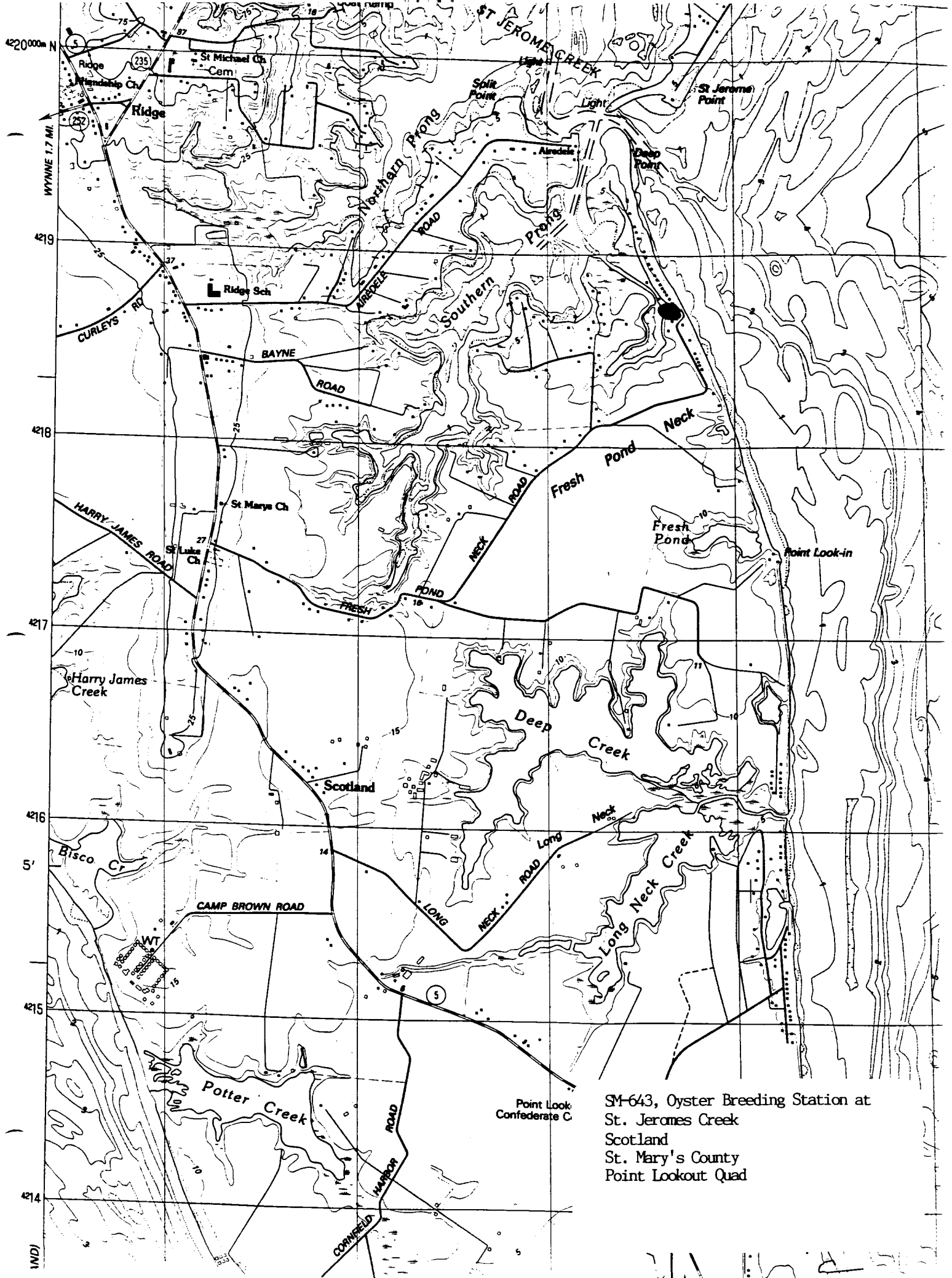
Grantee: Elizabeth C. Powell (of Accomac County, Virginia)

Grantor: William M. Loker

Date: September 6, 1916

Notes: In another circuit court case between James Stall, friend of Elizabeth Powell v. Elizabeth F. Powell (#1161 NE), the William M. Loker is appointed trustee so that the property could be sold. Here the tract is listed as containing 66 acres. Disagreement about the ownership of this property seems to have extended into the 1800s for in 1887, attorney Robert C. Combs determined in a memorandum that a John Wrightson had no legal title to the tract that the United States Fish Commission leased from him. Combs notes that Elizabeth Hopkins deeded the property in 1841 to a James L. Foxwell from whom Wrightson derived ownership from (See significance for National Archives reference). It is difficult to determine how and when the Commission's lease was ended and how the Powell's gained an interest in the property.





SM-643, Oyster Breeding Station at  
St. Jeromes Creek  
Scotland  
St. Mary's County  
Point Lookout Quad